

Gap gets grant to build Bradley, tank firing range

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Thanks to a \$15.6 million grant, National Guard troops will no longer have to take long bus trips to train on M-1 tanks and Bradley M-2 and M-3 fighting vehicles.

A multipurpose **training range**, to be built here starting next summer, will cover 4,800 acres and stretch just under 2 miles.

Gap spokesman Col. Chris Cleaver said soldiers will be able to "train, shoot and qualify" on the range, which will be set up east to west.

"We're really excited to have that capability," Cleaver said. "We'll be breaking ground this summer and it will take one year to build, so we expect to begin using it in [2005]."

Fiber optic hook-ups linking a control tower to targets will enable troops to determine their shooting accuracy.

"This can show you where you hit on a target," Cleaver said. "For advanced weapons systems, that's where you have to do target training. This puts Fort Indiantown Gap in step with the most advanced technology out there."

Troops now train on the M-1 tank and Bradley fighting vehicles at Fort Drum, N.Y., or Fort Pickett, Va.

"The soldiers had to be transported between 300 and 400 miles," said Rep. Tim Holden, D-Schuylkill County, who announced the funding yesterday.

"I would rather spend time on the ground training than riding a bus," said Col. Raymond Hastings, who will oversee construction of the range.

Between 7,000 and 8,000 Pennsylvania National Guard troops train each year at the Gap.

Skiff said the Army National Guard's Stryker brigade also will train on the range. The Stryker is the Army's modern combat vehicle; Pennsylvania's National Guard is one of six Stryker brigades and the only Guard unit.